



Washington Jewish Week

McCain avoids Trump, discusses Middle East at Sixth & I appearance

JUNE 1, 2017 BY [DAN SCHERE](#) — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

On stage at Sixth & I Historic Synagogue in Washington last week, Arizona Sen. John McCain gave his characteristic straight talk about the Middle East, last year's presidential election and the need for bipartisanship. But when interviewer Leon Wieseltier asked him about President Donald Trump, the Republican senator retreated.

"When you can't sleep at night because of the president, what keeps you up?" asked Wieseltier, a public intellectual and Brookings Institution senior fellow.

"I worry about a divided America," replied McCain.

Still, the senator admitted to the audience that he and his fellow members of Congress have been going through "some degree of shock" since Trump was elected. "Nobody believed, in either party, that the results were going to be what they were going to be."

McCain was the featured speaker on May 24 at the Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Lecture, sponsored by the Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital.

On foreign policy, McCain said the top priority in the new administration is Syria and Iran. Achieving an Israel-Palestinian peace, which Trump touted during his overseas trip last week, is much farther down the list of priorities.

"I don't mean to be pessimistic, but I'm not sure you're going to see much more [on Israel] when we have been overtaken by the challenges in Iran and Syria," he said. "That does not mean that we stop trying."

McCain praised National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, Defense Secretary James Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly. As for Trump, he ended with a question mark.

"I think this president has assembled a national security team that, frankly, all of us should be very pleased with," he said. "That's the good news. Another side of that coin is who does the president listen to? I'm not sure."

JPDS parent Jennifer Blumenthal said McCain was "terrific" and welcomed his hopeful tone.

"I really appreciated what he said about the divisiveness on both sides of the aisle politically and how important it is for us to come back together as a country," she said.

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